

ABSTRACT

RESEARCH PAPER: Ethical And Anti-racist Grading Of Grammar: Reassessing Rubric Values

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A prescriptive view of grammar in writing assessment perpetuates biases. Asao Inoue (2017) explains, “There is nothing inherently wrong with the dominant white, middle class English... but using it to judge others, to punish or withhold opportunities and privileges, is racist...” Research presents ample evidence that people use grammar to judge character, lowering the reliability of assessment if grammar is a criterion. Balester (2012), Dryer (2013), and Davila (2017) identify the various biases in writing assessment tools themselves that can perpetuate this belief—such as language or the suppression of author voice and agency—, allowing biases to be carried out in assessment and thus reinforce racist systems or a deficit mindset of language varieties. Instructors can be unaware of these biases. This prompts the questions: How do instructors define and assess grammar? What views and beliefs do they have about grammar? To answer these, 14 participants completed a survey about assessment beliefs and language ideology. Then, 11 rubrics were collected and coded for grammar values. These were analyzed for alignment to determine gaps that could host biases. Results indicate that prescriptive views of grammar and an overemphasis on reader control are present in instructor beliefs and rubrics. This is paired with limited integration of grammar in the classroom, limiting opportunities for improvement or critical rhetorical awareness. Additionally, misalignment between rubrics and

beliefs as well as underdeveloped assessment tools can host “invisible criteria” that privilege students with prior experience in academic writing. The research suggests that instructors and other stakeholders (such as administrators or other departments) can take a more active role in combating grammar biases in assessment and defining grammar use as a rhetorical activity.